



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

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In this issue:

New editor	1
UKMA Annual Conference 2008 - 5 July	1
AA survey	2
Can you measure that?	3
Mail order catalogues	5
Century of UK's oldest kilometre sign	6
Subscriptions	6
Welcome to new members	6

New editor

A new face : (sorry, an old one)



Hi I'm Martin Clutterbuck. I have been asked to produce your UKMA Newsletter.

I hope you like the new format as well as the content.

If you have any comments on either please contact me at:

editor@metric.org.uk

UKMA Annual Conference

2008 - 5 July

Report by Derek Pollard UKMA secretary

Robin began by summarising the projects that were selected for action in 2007-8. He had grouped the projects into live, deferred and dropped, and commented on each. Success overall had been limited, partly due to the hostile climate, and partly due to lack of resources. Members' contributions included suggested ways of taking some of the projects forward in 2008-9.

John Frewen-Lord followed by discussing the growing acceptance in Britain of two incompatible systems of measurement, side by side. He went on to suggest that metric needs to appear as the simple option, and drew on his experience in Canada to show how this might be done.

Robin concluded the morning session by outlining options for taking our campaign forward. These ranged from direct action, ARM style, to becoming a charitable organisation dispensing information, like USMA. The view of the Conference, however, was that we should continue our present course, spending perhaps less time on politicians and more on the public.

Road signage

After lunch, Tony Wilson enlivened the Conference with graphic examples on how it might be possible to take forward the campaign on road signage. The Signs Working Group is looking at several options including a new assault on the DfT's absurdly inflated costs of sign replacement, steps to highlight the hidden costs of non conversion, informing local authorities about current options for metric signage, and seeking allies in the road haulage industry and road safety organisations. It was suggested that members might be able to assist the campaign by obtaining the cost of sign replacement from their own local authorities.

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Web site

The current main website has recently been replaced by a "new generation" website (same URL www.ukma.org.uk). Phil outlined the benefits that this will bring. Members are asked to send any comments to him at p.hall@ukma.org.uk and to advise him of any errors or any pages that need updating.

Prominent Peaks

Roddy Urquhart then explained the purpose and principles of the proposed Prominent Peaks web site, and brought the Conference up-to-date with developments which have occurred since the project was reported in UKMA News in April 2008. Although it will be a separate website, it will be linked to the UKMA main site in the hope that climbers and hill walkers will be attracted to sample the more persuasive material on our site. It is intended that 'Prominent Peaks' will be launched in the autumn. Members will be among the first to know.

An innovation at this year's Conference was an opportunity for members to raise issues. These included:

- A presentation by Terry Simpson on work he is doing with local authorities. The project aims to encourage local Councils to meet legal requirements in relation to metric use in their dealings with the public. He provided statistics showing the progress that has been made – the chief culprit is the rod, still to be found on allotments. Terry is also concerned about the prevalence of sq. ft. in estate agent adverts for letting of offices, and sought help from members in dealing with this.
- A plea from Anne Attlee for support for "user-friendly" metric for those without a "technical" background. This followed on from John's remarks earlier in the day. Anne opposed the use of mm and ml outside technical documents and sang the praises of 'c units', the cm and the cL.
- A suggestion from Jerome Tucker that a good quality A5 leaflet is needed, introducing UKMA to young people. This could perhaps be distributed through schools.
- A question from Philip Bladon about haphazard enforcement by Trading Standards. In some street markets the law is totally ignored, ensuring imperial measures continue, and discouraging any alternative. Yet in pubs and restaurants dire penalties have been threatened for those who use metric glasses.
- There was also a written query from Keith Atkin about support for completing the metric changeover from professional associations and about the position of Education Ministers on the metrication issue.

Robin concluded the Conference by summarising progress during the year with the blog, www.metricviews.org.uk. 'Visits' had risen, but slowly; the flow of articles from members had not. It was clear that some members preferred Googling to blogging.

Copies of these presentations are available by e-mail from the Secretary, secretary@metric.org.uk:

Robin's analysis of the projects selected for action in 2007-8

John's thoughts on the 'two system-system' and easy metric

Robin's ideas for future options

Tony on the road signs campaign

Terry Simpson's local authority project

AA survey

An AA/Populus Panel survey published on the 2 August 2008 states that:

"Panel members don't support going metric on the roads

Two thirds of UK drivers are reticent when it comes to any attempts to adopt metric measurement for all things motoring, according to the latest AA/Populus poll of 18,500 members.

Millions of UK drivers happily take to Europe's roads each summer and 'vive la difference' - speed limits indicated in kilometres per hour and distances to La Plage in kilometres rather than miles."

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

The UKMA response

The UK Metric Association dismissed as “unrepresentative and old hat” the findings of an AA/Populus panel, showing that a large majority of AA members are opposed to metric road signs in the UK

UKMA Chairman, Robin Paice, said: “It is no surprise that a self-selected group of 18 500 AA members should not appreciate the case for going metric on the roads, especially when the Government has produced absurdly exaggerated cost figures to try to stifle discussion. The case for metric road signs has never been properly explained to the general public.”

(It appears that over 21 000 out of 40 000 panel members did not respond to the survey).

In spite of these ‘findings’, the AA at least recognises the problems caused by bridge strikes and even refers to our own UKMA as shown here :

“There are still 2,000 bridges struck each year despite numerous campaigns to prevent this. **The UK Metric Association** has recently reported that just days after a Slovenian driver crashed his lorry into a low bridge near Cannock in Staffordshire on the busy West Coast Main Line a Hungarian lorry hit the same bridge. Although the low clearance is signposted, the signs show only imperial units, which most foreign drivers do not understand.”

So we DO make an impact! (hopefully not bridge bashes!).

Let's see more of these signs –



Can you measure that?

The editor's daughter was recently given a fancy cake for a birthday present, see illustration below:



So what's special about that? Nothing much, the cake was one of those chocolaty sticky affairs with various decorations stuck on top.

So, presumably not a precision instrument then!

So why on earth was the weight shown as 272 g?

Surely most people would not even notice if the figure was 270 g (or 250 g or 300 g).

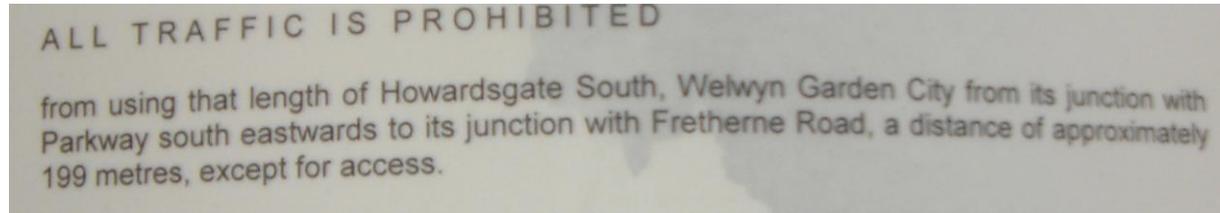
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SO WHY NOT SAY 270 g?

Do confectionery suppliers to supermarkets use production equipment accurate enough for spacecraft manufacture? Doubtful, so what are acceptable tolerances on such items and what is implied by the labelling?

A quick scan of the internet for bakery items provided little guidance, so what do UKMA members think?

Another example seen recently – “a distance of approximately 199 metres” for a section of road to be maintained.



Who is the notice addressed to? Presumably the general public using the road.

Who has a device capable of measuring - 199 m to make sure that the distance isn't really 200 m (approximately)? Presumably only the people responsible for the notice.

SO WHY NOT SAY 200 m?

TESCO recently have changed their packaging of fresh cream from round fl oz to round metric measures, 300 ml and 600 ml for example, so it can be done!



Other thoughts on the subject from our Chairman

The 454 g for jam and honey etc is actually mandatory for products packed in the UK although this doesn't apply to imports (ref. "Cassis de Dijon" and "Cidrerie Ruwet " judgements in the European Court).

However, prescribed quantities will be outlawed from 11 April 2009 (with a few exceptions – mainly wines per Directive 2007/45/EC)

Opponents deliberately give spurious accuracy in order to make metric look scientific and difficult (hence not suitable for everyday life)

Partly reflects poor maths education - people (esp. journalists) don't understand when accuracy is important, and when to approximate - e.g. Eurostar travels at 186 mph exactly, rather than has a top speed of approximately 300 km/h.

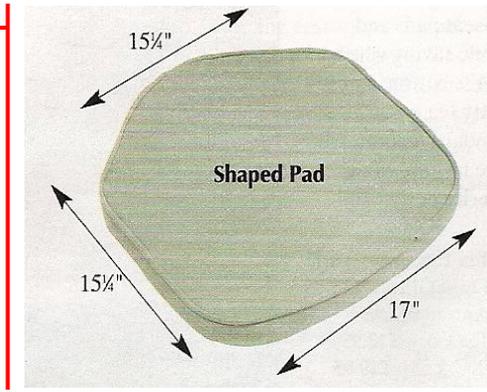
Planning Bill included a figure of 209.03 square metres (translated by civil servants from 250 sq yds). After our lobbying it was changed to 200 m².

What do you think? Do you have any other examples? Please contact the editor.

Mail order catalogues

How many of these do you receive through your letterbox, whether you request them or not?

Do you despair at the lack of metric measures in catalogues such this example?



Notice the quaint use of 1/4" – how much neater to show 38x38x43 cm?

Compare with this one –



Are both businesses targeting the same people? How much revenue is lost through returns due to mis-interpretations of sizes?

Who decides on the policies governing these companies's advertisement of sizes, what motivates them to be different, surely their objective is to maximise sales.

The UKMA position could not be clearer – the United Kingdom needs that elusive single rational system of measurement!

Century of UK's oldest kilometre sign

From Metric Views www.metricviews.org.uk

While sporting eyes turned to Beijing's Olympic games, the UK's oldest kilometre sign celebrated its centenary. 100 years ago, the organisers of the 1908 London Olympics erected this sign in Eton as a marathon marker showing the way to White City



It has to be admitted that this sign shows its mile value more predominantly, and its use of "KILOS" is not quite the correct form of km UKMA would advocate today, but this little piece of history is believed by UKMA to be the oldest surviving British sign showing kilometres, although if any members can point to any other signs we are happy to bestow the honour on an older sign in a later edition!

It does seem rather extraordinary that a century on, we are still struggling to use two different systems, with London's Marathon still having to sport both mile and kilometre markers in 2008.

This sign also goes to show that signs of historical significance can be retained as an interesting local feature long after their practical life is over; modernising our road signs with km would not mean the end for the genuinely historic mile marker posts dotted throughout the UK.

Let's just hope that as this historic marker enters its second century it stays unmolested by those who take grave offence at kilometres on British signs.

Subscriptions

Members are reminded that subscriptions for the year from June 2008 to June 2009 are now due.

At the AGM it was agreed to keep subscriptions for 2008/09 at their previous rates, which are:

Individual £15

Concession £5

Life £150

Subscriptions can be paid in any of the following ways (the first two being free of charges to UKMA):

By bank transfer directly to UKMA's account (60-05-16, 16440846), using online or telephone banking, or contact the treasurer at treasurer@metric.org.uk.

By cheque, payable to UK Metric Association, sent to the treasurer at: Tony Wilson, 1 Isambard Place, London, SE16 7DA

By PayPal, following the link on this page: http://www.metric.org.uk/your_role/Donations.aspx

By Moneybookers account, quoting the recipient as treasurer@metric.org.uk

UKMA can receive standing orders direct from bank accounts if you wish to set up an annual standing order to ensure your subscriptions are paid on time.

Please continue to support UKMA by renewing your subscription for the current year if you have not already done so, or this may be your last issue!

Welcome to new members

UKMA is pleased to welcome the following new members:

Ray Robertson

Michael Yorke

Thank you for your support.